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Ordinance Will Reduce Particulate and Toxic Pollution

San Jose Restricts Fireplaces

The City of San Jose will require cleaner burning fireplaces in new homes and in renovations of existing fire places if a "Wood Smoke Ordinance" is approved by the San Jose City Council on its second reading on Tuesday, June 20. It was approved unanimously (11-0) by the Council on a first vote on June 5th,

Wood smoke is a major source of pollution in the winter months, accounting for 40 percent of the particulate matter in the air. It also generates carbon monoxide and toxic pollutants, including dioxin. Particulate matter pollution has been linked to adverse health effects, including premature death, in recent health studies.

The ordinance will allow natural gas fireplaces, EPA certified fireplace inserts, EPA certified wood stoves or pellet stoves. The cleaner burning equipment will reduce the amount of particulate matter by 75 to 90 percent compared to a standard fireplace. Currently, approximately 10 percent of new homes in San Jose are built with standard fireplaces. In addition to new homes, the ordinance would also require replacement of standard fireplaces when the fireplace unit is repaired in an existing home, or whenever remodeling construction will occur within 12 inches of the fireplace.

" This ordinance protects everyone's health, but especially those who already suffer from this type of pollution" according to San Jose Council member Charlotte Powers, Chair of the Transportation and Development Committee. "Wood smoke is a source of air pollution that's easy to reduce at relatively low cost."

The wood-burning ordinance was patterned after a model wood smoke ordinance developed by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) and distributed to cities and counties in the Bay Area.

"The City of San Jose did the right thing," said Ellen Garvey, the Air District's Executive Officer. "Wood smoke is a very serious health threat. To have a metropolitan area like San Jose take a stand to reduce pollution is a major breakthrough for the quality of life of San Jose residents. The Air District urges other cities in the region to make this clean air choice by adopting the model ordinance for their communities."

Petaluma and Los Gatos adopted wood burning ordinances in 1992. In May of this year, Palo Alto adopted a similar ordinance.

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